

## **North America – Natural Resources (Summary)**

from the film *North America – Location and Boundaries*, Mexus Education, Ltd.

- North America is richer than any other continent in natural resources. This has made USA and Canada two of the most advanced and modern countries in the world.

### **Minerals**

- North America is very rich in **minerals** especially **fossil fuels** and **metallic minerals**, which form the base of modern industry.
- **Coal** is an important source of power and a crucial raw material in the manufacture of steel. North America has huge reserves of coal and about **20% of the world's coal is mined in Pennsylvania**.
- **Petroleum** is an important source of power. it is the only fuel that is used by modern means of transportation. It also provides the raw material in the manufacture of lubricants, Vaseline, soap, and many other products. (plastics and fertilizers)
- The major reserves of petroleum in North America are seen in a broad arc from Alaska to Texas in the USA. It is also found in Canada and Mexico. **The USA is the third largest producer of petroleum in the world.**
- The USA is the second largest producer of **iron ore** after Russia. Iron ore and coal are very important for the **steel** industry which forms the basis for industrial growth. Large deposits of iron ore are found in the area around Lake Superior and in the eastern part of the Canadian Shield. Iron is also found in the southern Appalachians.
- The United States is the largest producer of **copper** in the world. It is used in the manufacture of copper wires and is mined extensively around the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains.
- Mexico is the world's largest producer of **silver**. Besides being used to make jewelry for thousands of years, today silver is also used in the photographic industry. Large deposits of silver are also found in the USA and Canada.

- Canada and the United States produce substantial amounts of **gold** which is mined in the Rocky Mountains. Canada produces about 90% of the world's **nickel**. Canada is also the largest producer of **asbestos, zinc, and platinum** and the second largest producer of **cobalt, uranium, and radium**. The United States is the world's largest producer of uranium and **sulphur**.

### **Forest Products**

- The **Coniferous** forests in Northern Canada, Western Cordilleras, and the Appalachians provide **softwood** lumber. Wood from the pine, spruce, willow, beech, and the oak trees is used to make furniture.
- The pine and spruce trees provide **wood pulp** for the paper industry, as well as raw material for the **synthetic fiber** industry of Canada and USA. Pine trees also provide **resin** and **turpentine** oil. Chicle trees in British Honduras provide **chewing gum**.
- The **tropical forests** provide a significant amount of timber for the manufacture of furniture and newsprint despite being cut down to provide land for human settlement and cultivation in the past decade. Forests provide occupations to millions of people in the USA and Canada in the lumbering, paper, rayon, and other related industries.
- Mexico and countries of Central America have tropical forests. Mahogany, logwood, and cedar are important trees of the tropical forests. These are called hardwood trees.

### **Agriculture: Crop Production**

- Although only 10% of the land is under **cultivation**, North America is a surplus food producer. Extensive agriculture is practiced in Canada and USA, in case of which, farms are large, covering hundreds of **hectares**. (1 hectare = 2.5 acres) Tractors, harvesters, and other machines are used for plowing and other work on the farm.
- With the help of scientific methods of cultivation and widespread use of fertilizers, North America is the world's largest producer of maize, wheat, and soybeans.

- **Wheat**, a natural grass improved by man over the centuries, grows well in the temperate grasslands of the world. It is grown extensively in the Prairies of North America, where the soil is quite fertile and deep. Hence, North America is the largest producer of wheat.
- **Maize**, also known as corn, is the original food crop of North America and the main staple food grain in Mexico. Most of the maize is used for cattle and pigs. It is grown in large quantities in the southern prairies as it requires a warm climate and frequent showers in summer. North America produces more than half of the total maize produced in the world.
- **Barley** and **oats** are temperate crops which can stand more cold and need less water. Barley is used to make beer in large quantities, while oats are used as cattle fodder.
- **Cotton** grows well in the Mississippi Basin, south of the prairies, as well as in Mexico. The warm summers with frequent rainfall and fertile soil provide suitable conditions for growing cotton. North America is the largest producer of cotton in the world and also produces superior long staple variety.
- **Tobacco** is cultivated in southern USA and Cuba, but some of the best varieties are grown in North America.
- **Sugarcane** is cultivated in the south, along the Gulf of Mexico, parts of Central America, and the West Indies. Cuba, known as the 'Sugar Bowl of the world' is the world's largest exporter of sugar.
- **Soybean** is an important crop that is grown in the same areas as maize in North America. Edible oil is extracted from the beans with the help of heavy machines.
- **Potatoes** and **sugar beets** are grown in many areas of the prairies. Sugar beet is used for making sugar. Both crops are used to feed cattle and pigs.

- Just like sugarcane, **rice** is also cultivated in the southern parts of North America, along the Gulf of Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies. The USA exports large quantities of rice since the population is relatively small and rice is not the staple food here.
- **Fruits** are cultivated in California, around the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Valley.

### **Agriculture: Livestock**

- **Cattle rearing** is carried on a commercial scale in the drier parts of the prairies in the southwestern part of the United States with the use of scientific methods and modern technology.
- Vast herds of cattle and sheep are kept on large **ranches**. Cattle rearing has now become one of the most popular industries in the country considering its usefulness as well as revenue.
- Cattle are bred to grow quickly and yield large quantities of meat. When the animals are five to twelve months old, they are sent to **feedlots**. There they are kept in pens and fed grain and vitamin supplements until they reach market size. North America is the largest producer of meat with about one-fourth of the world's production.

### **Agriculture: Dairy**

- **Dairy farming** is an important industry for USA and Canada. The dairy belt extends from the cooler and humid parts of the prairies, through the Great Lakes area, to the northeast region along the Atlantic coast. Milk, cheese, and butter are the chief products. North America produces about 25% of the world's total milk and dairy products.

### **Fisheries**

- Fishing is developed on a commercial scale in the seas around the continent. The **Grand Banks**, one of the world's finest fishing grounds, is located off the island of Newfoundland in Canada. It has extensive **continental shelf** making the water shallow enough for the sunlight to reach the bottom.
- Here, the cold **Labrador Current** from the north meets the warm **Gulf Stream** from the south. The mixing of cold and warm waters provides suitable conditions for fish to thrive. The cold Labrador Current also brings plenty of **plankton**, which provides food for fish.
- **Cod** is the main catch of the Grand Banks. Halibut, herring, and mackerel are some of the fish caught along the Atlantic coast. Salmon is the main fish of the Pacific coast.

### **Hydroelectricity Production**

- North America is rich in water resources except the desert regions of the USA and Mexico. **Hydroelectricity** is generated at the Niagara Falls in Canada and USA, along the eastern Appalachians, St. Lawrence, and the rivers of the Canadian Shield. North America is now the largest producer of hydroelectricity.
- The Tennessee Valley Authority on the Tennessee River in the United States is the first example of a multipurpose project, i.e. it is meant to serve many purposes such as irrigation, hydroelectricity, flood control, and navigation, simultaneously.